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CIA Repeats Fears on Missing Uranium

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The Central Intelligence Agency has repeated its fears that uranium that disappeared 12 years ago from a factory in Pennsylvania may have been diverted to Israel to make nuclear weapons.

On Feb. 6, unnamed officials from the CIA briefed officials of the Nuclear Regulatory Commission and said there were still strong suspicions inside the CIA that weapons-grade uranium had been smuggled to Israel more than 10 years ago. The briefing was the second in two years given the NRC by the CIA in which these suspicions were voiced.

Sources said the CIA briefers repeated last Feb. 6 the same suspicions that different briefers had mentioned two years ago about the missing uranium. Basically, the CIA suspected a connection because 206 pounds of uranium disappeared from a factory in Apollo, Pa., about the same time the CIA felt Israel had developed nuclear weapons.

Emphasizing that the CIA suspicions were not an official CIA view, sources said there were some people inside the agency who thought there were strong links between the missing uranium and Israel's acquisition of weapons and others who believed there were no links at all.

"At no time has it been alleged that the CIA believed uranium had been

stolen and moved to Israel," one source insisted. "The CIA said this two years ago and they reaffirmed this belief at the briefing on Feb. 6."

Precisely what the CIA told the NRC in this year's briefing and the one two years ago still lies under a heavy shroud of secrecy. The CIA refuses all press requests for information on the missing uranium. The NRC officials briefed by the CIA refer all calls on the briefings back to the CIA.

Despite the secrecy, sources said yesterday that NRC officials had come away from the second briefing unconvinced that the missing uranium had been smuggled to Israel. Sources said the CIA suspicions are "still based on circumstantial evidence and no more."

Some of the information given by the CIA in its briefings to NRC is classified "secret." How the CIA came to suspect that the missing uranium wound up in Israel is classified "top secret," meaning that the NRC was also told the CIA's opinion on how Israel acquired nuclear weapons in the last 10 years.

The only thing revealed publicly yesterday is that the CIA on Feb. 6 briefed a new raft on NRC officials, including Chairman Joseph Hendrie and executive operations director Lee V. Gossick, who had been left out of the first briefing two years ago for unknown reasons.

Testifying before the House subcommittee on energy and the environment, Gossick said one reason he said

a year ago that there was "no evidence" for a diversion is that he had not attended the CIA briefing two years ago.

"I have since recognized that I did not properly answer that question," Gossick said. "I was asked for my personal assurance, which I could not give since I had not attended the CIA briefing given the Nuclear Regulatory Commission in February, 1976."

Rep. Morris K. Udall (D-Ariz.), chairman of the House subcommittee, criticized Gossick and the three NRC Commissioners present at yesterday's hearing for not being "completely candid and frank" about whether they had "evidence, no evidence or no conclusive evidence" that a diversion of uranium had happened.

"I get the feeling you are protecting nuclear power interests," Udall said, "that you are worried that nuclear power might get hurt in all this."

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